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MEMOIRS OF BRIGADIER-GENERAL JOHN LACEY,  
OF PENNSYLVANIA.

(Continued from Vol. XXV. page 515.)

Gen<sup>l</sup> Washington having collected his scattered Troops made a Dash on the Enemy at Trenton, after the Capture of the Hessians there, and giving Gen<sup>l</sup> How the slip, the detail of which Manuvre is already before the Public. by this masterly stroke the Enemy was made to retire from the Banks of the Delaware, and remained quiet at Brunswick in the State of New Jersey untill the opening of the Campaign the insuing summer. On his leaving our Neighbourhood the tranquility and fearfull apprehensions of the People were allayed; but I soon discovered a radical change had taken place in the Political sentiments of my Neighbours and acquaintances, during my Absence. A sullen vindictive and malignant spirit seme to have taken hold of a large portion of the People in this County, whose Hostility to the Revolution was too apparent not to be noticed, and semed only waiting a good opertunity to brake forth openly in favour of England, and against their own Country—Threats and meanances where used by them, when in Company of those they dare to use them. Happy for the Whigs, however, the Tories were a set of Paltroons and Cowards, afraid Openly to espouse their Cause, and declare themselves. While the Whigs on the other hand acted Openly, avowed their intentions, and determination to live free & Independent or die gloriously in the struggle fighting for their Country. The Tories sneekingly continued to Act under Cover, giving secret information, when ever they could to the British, rediculing the American Officers, and using every means they could invent to discourage the Whigs—and disswaidd them from joining the American army—or

Militia—In Bucks County it was hard to say which party was the most numerous—a great part of the disaffected were persons Who made a Plea of Consience in refusing to bear arms—this was a deadly blow to the Party—& this cause more than any other gave a strong preponderance in favour of the Revolution, untill the active and unseasing persiveriance of the Whigs, carried all before them and bore down all opposition by their sturdyness and firm persiverance in favour of the Revolution. The change of Politicks, and principles, when I left the country with my company, all was peace and harmony among the People in the neighbourhood on my return they appeared all hostile to each other, Whig & Tory in a state little better than open Enemies, they were Worse, especially the Tories, for they were secretly doing the Wigs all the harm they could possibly do—Traducing, villifying and in all ways and means committing hidden acts to weaken the americans cause, and applauding the British, representing the Power of Great Britton to be Omnipotent—and that it was the highth of madness & folly to oppose her, thus throwing every Clog in the Way that lay in their power. I almost begun to doubt whither I had not mistaken my Native Country, for that of an Enemies—The Hostility of the Tories was so great to Indipendance, that nothing but cowardice alone prevented their Taking up arms and openly declaring themselves in favour of and joining the British Army. They actually did every thing they dare do, by encouraging the youth to go over and join the British, and Actually did send many to them. The Legislature under the New Constitution were Sitting in Philada—and were progressing in Acts to Organize the Government—They had a New Militia Law to make, which they passed on the 17<sup>th</sup> of March A.D. 1777. It was requisite the People should be Armed, organized and put in readiness as soon as possible to be ready to oppose the progress of the Enemy the Next Campaign, Who it was expected, would make great efforts to overrun the Country and take possession of Philad\*

—It was highly important this Act should go into operation immediately. I was applied to by my Uncle Wilkinson one of the Members of Assembly from Bucks County, to Accept the Commission of sub Lieutenant for the County—In order to facilitate the operation of this Law—The Legislature had provided in it—the establishment of a kind of Civil and Military Trybunal under officers called—L<sup>t</sup> Lieutenant—and Sub Lieutenants in each County—With the — of Colo<sup>l</sup> and Lieu<sup>t</sup> Colonels—Who were to hold Courts to Class and district the Militia and to organize them into Regiments and Companies, hold the Elections for Officers—and to call out the Classes, find Substitutes in place of Delinquents—To assess or cause the Assessments on Delinquents to be collected and paid into the State Treasury—with other extensive Powers enumerated in the Law. I agreed to Accept the appointment. Joseph Kirkbride Esq one of the members of Assembly from this county was appointed the Lieut—John Gill, myself—Sam<sup>l</sup> Smith and Andrew Keichline were chosen the sub Lieut<sup>s</sup>—My Commission dated 22 Day of March 1777. We were summoned to meet by the Lieut Colo<sup>l</sup> Kirkbride at New Town to enter upon the Functions of our Office. Having seen some service and knowing More of Military matters than any of my brethren in office. I became a very active and useful Member. We immediately commenced in our duty—Appointed persons in each Township in the County to take the names of all Male White inhabitants between the Ages of Eighteen and fifty three, with orders to make returns to us on a certain Day named in their order to which time we adjoined; The Persons so employed being urged to make all possible dispatch, executed their orders, with punctual exactness, when we proceeded to divide the County into five Districts—allotting each districts to Compose one Regimt—each Regiment to be commanded by One Colo. Lieut Col and one Major. To be divided into Eight Companies each Company to be commanded by One Capt one Lieut—and one Ensign—Elections were held and the officers Chosen, with such Hasitivity that

on my being sent with the returns of the Names of the Officers Chosen, to the Executive Council in Philad<sup>a</sup> I was Complimented by them on being the First of the Counties who had made returns of their Elections of Officers. John Armstrong Esq<sup>r</sup> of Cumberland County was Appointed by the Executive Council a Major Gen<sup>l</sup> he had been a Colo<sup>l</sup> last French and Indian War where he served with Reputation, he was now an Old Man, but stood high as a Friend to the Independence and Liberty of his Country, and in private life of unblemished Character. John Cadwallader Sam<sup>l</sup> Merridith and James Potter Esq<sup>rs</sup> were appointed Brigadier Gen<sup>l</sup>—These were doubtless all good appointments, excepting Merridith Who was quite an unmilitary Character his declining to accept the appointment was no detriment to the service—Cadwallader's rejection was seriously to be regretted, he was an Active, enterprising and spirited Man; but unfortunately these two Men had leaged themselves with the party hostile to the New Constitution, determined to oppose all measures used to carry it into operation—Their enmity to it was so great, they intirely overlooked the fatal effects their opposition might produce in distroying the general Cause of Independence, by their disorganization, and imbarisment, they would give the Goverment very unwisely Judging this to be the proper time to reform, the Constitution, while the Enemy was at our Gates—indeed Among us, within Our Doors, for we had a formadable Enemy in the numerous Tories in the City and Philad<sup>a</sup> and Bucks Counties who ketched at this opposition, and fand the Flame they had seen so Auspiciously began Among the Wigs themselves as they conceived, and which they hailed as a happy Omen of their sertain tryumph and victory.—

Many of the First Charactors in the State, out of a dislike of some of the Sections of this Constitution, on account of giving too Much Power to the Legislature, it having but one Branch, and on the whole being too loose and Democratic—exhited a most formadable opposition by those who called themselves the Nobility and better sort of the People.

The Militia of the District in which I lived chose me Lieut Colo<sup>l</sup> which I Accepted—this appointment not interfering with my other Commission as Sub Lieut. I continued to act in both capacities—The Commission of Lieut Colo<sup>l</sup> was dated the sixth day of May 1777—several drafts were made from the Militia to join the Main Army under Genl Washington to oppose the Enemy who had landed at the Head of Elk in the State of Maryland and were advancing through the State of Dalaware arrived at the Brandawine—Where a decisive engagement of the two armies obliged Genl Washington to retire with his flying Troops to the East Bank of the Schoolkill—The enemy following—crossed the schoolkill and entered the City of Philad<sup>a</sup> without further opposition,—Genl Washington having taken a strong position in the upper end of Philad<sup>a</sup> County made no effort to stop the advance of the Enemy to the City—Genl Howe having placed a part of his Troops on the Hights of Germantown a village about 5 Miles from the City. Genl Washington conceiving this a favourable object put his troops in Motion and made a vigorous attack on the Enemy who were unapprised of his movements untill their Sentries hailed the advanced Colloms of our Troops—Who rushed forward drove the Enemy on all Quarters and took possession of their Camp—this would have been a decisive day in favour of america—had not the american Troops halted to dislodge a few of the Enemy who had taken shelter in a large stone House belonging to Benj Chew—which so retarded their progress the Enemy had time to Rally and being supported by fresh Troops from the City—The American army were stoped in their persuit—broaken parties coming up in persuit of the flying Enemy to the new formed line of the British troops were unable to force them a second time, had to fall back, the Enemy taking advantage of their disorder advanced—the American Troops not being able to form were pushed back in turn, the Gen<sup>l</sup> finding the Day lost ordered a retreat which was done in Tollorable order—thus ended an affare that on the

onset promised so fair and which we had every assurance to believe, had it not been for the stoppage at Chews House would have been a Compleat victory; but he that holds the destinies of Battles and events in his own hands, had decreed it should be otherwise. After this the Enemy retired to the City and Genl Washington encamped in a very advantagous position on the Hights of White Marsh. Altho I had no Command at this time I was with the Militia in the above affare—They were posted on the right of the American Army with orders to turn the Enemies left—before they came to the place allotted them the Enemy were gone, and their New line was formed so far to the left I saw their was little likelihood of their coming into contact with them. I rode forward to where the Main Army was engaged and had an oportunity of seeing the manner in which the affare was conducted—We had full possession of the Enemies Camp which was on fire in many places Dead and Wounded Men laying strewed about on all Quarters—When the Order for Retreat came the American Troops were in much disorder those in front who had been driven back by the Enemy falling on those in the Rear increased the Confusion, It was impossible to form Troops in such order as to oppose the advancing Enemy a general retreat was inevitably necessary to save the American Army from a general rout.

The affare of Chews House, was not, in my mind, the only cause for the loss of this Battle, there were others equally important. Genl Greens Division composing the left wing of the Armeý, was either led astray by their Guide, or mistook their way, wandered so far to the left, they never came into the action—the right wing composed of the Pennsy<sup>a</sup> Militia of about four thousand—in like manner being so far to the right, neither of which, I have ever been able to learn saw the Enemy that Day. Had they equally acted their part with that of the Senter, commanded in person by Genl Washington and pushed the Enemies flanks with spirit and alairity, as they ought to have done—they must have been prevented of forming a second line, as they did without

opposition, and after rallying having none to contend with but the senter Division of the American Army and only part of that, the other having halted at Chews House—Those who did advance in persuit of the flying enemy being broken and out of Order, were unable to make any impression on the Enemy, thus drawn up in Order, soon gave way—The fate of the Day so favourable to the American Arms on the onset instantly changed sides. Genl Washington perceiving the Day lost, gave a general order for retreat.—

The time of the Militia from Bucks County was up the last of Oct. Others were Ordered by the Executive Council to be ready to releave them. They were required by the Lieutenants to rendesvous at New Town—their not being a Collo<sup>s</sup> Command, and altho, it was not my Toor according to rotation, the Lieut Cornal whose duty it was to go, consented for me to take his place. Having collected the Men principally substitutes between three or four Hundred, left New Town and joined Genl Potter's Brigade at White Marsh the begining of the Month of November, not long after Our arrival the British Army advanced from the City and took post on Chestnut Hill, the two Armies being in sight of each other: frequent reincountres insued between the advanced Parties, in one of which Genl. Ervine Commanding a Brigade of the Pennsy<sup>a</sup> Militia was Wounded and taken prisoner—my regiment was in several of those combats—in attacking and driving in the Enemies Picquets, who being reinforced, we were driven in turn, thus alternately advancing and retreating schrimminsing was kep up for several Days, a general engagement was daily expected. The Enemy after reconitering, and examining the American Army, finding them so strong and well posted declined the Combat and retired to the City. After which Genl Potters Brigade was ordered to take post on the West side of the schoolkill we passed over at a Ford a few miles below the Sweeds Ford and encamped about three Miles from the Gulf Mills on the Main Road leading from thence to Philad<sup>a</sup>. Next morning the Day of about

day brake we were alarmed by Colo<sup>l</sup> Edward Heston that the British were advancing up the Gulf Road—My Regiment was posted with its right to the Main road, on an Ememance, two other regiments, one on my left the Other on the right the remainder of the Brigade was drawn off by Gen<sup>l</sup> Potter and posted on a hight about half a mile in our rear, to cover our retreat. on the Enemies appearance, about two Hundred Yards in Our Front I ordered my men to commence firing, which was continued for three rounds, when the Enemy opened a Battery of Cannon with a discharge of small arms we however stood our ground, the men not offering to give Way untill I saw the Enemy advancing on Our Flanks both the Regiments to my left as well as on my right gave way and retired on the first Fire, left us exposed on both flanks, I ordered a retreat—three or four Men were cut down by the fire of the Enemy whose Bodies left—we retired into a Hollow—observing the Cannon Balls fired by the Enemy pass over our Heads cutting the Tops of the trees and striking the rising ground in our front—the ground on which we were first formed and for some distance back being Woods—I ordered the Men to Halt a few Moments untill the Enemy seased firing—when we passed the line formed in Our Rear by Gen<sup>l</sup> Potter and took post a few Hundred yards in their rear to cover their retreat. The Enemy were soon up to the second line which stood but one fire before they broak and fell back upon us. I tryed, as well as Potter and many of the other officers to rally them but in vain—the Enemy advancing we gave them a fire or two when a Genl. rout insued—every one making the best of his way—many of the men threw away their guns, that they might be less cumbered in running—I was among the Rear, and having in attempting to rally the Men got some distance from the Road—came to a fence which I got my Horse over without much difficulty; but on coming to a second fence after passing over a field, it being one side of a lane leading from the schoolkill to the Gulf road and stout. I called to the men who were passing over it to throw

off a rider, all being in such a hurry thought of nothing but self preservation, took no notice but left me to get over as well as I could. Twice did I run my Horse against the Fence without effect, on the third effort it gave way, I found myself in a lane rode full speed to the Main Road about two Hundred Yards on entering which I discovered a Collom of the Enemies Horse on the top of the Hill about fifty yards from me, they called to surrender. I halted; but on casting my Eyes down the Road saw our flying Troops about two hundred yards below—by a mere machanical movement without time to think I clapt spurs to my Horse and laying flat upon his weathen went full speed after them—The Enemy fired their Pistols or Carbines at me.—I heard the Bullets wish by me. Two Dragoons persued me, finding them gaining upon me on coming up with the hindmost troops, I ordered them to turn about and fire, several Muskets were discharged, as the men ran—by firing off their sholders without stoping or turning about—conceiving myself in more danger by this mode of firing from my own men than the Enemy called upon them to seace firing or they would shoot me. On my gaining the rear of the retreating Troops one of the Troopers took up his Horse, the other being a Horse of too much mettle refused to yield to his rider, dashed among the men and were both shot down togeather. The event was so sudden, and instantanious, it was impossible to save either man or Horse, more than twenty guns being discharged at them on the same moment. we passed the Gulf Mills, came to the sweeds Ford where we found Genl. Washington with the american army. Who had left White Marsh were on their Way to the Valley Forge on the West side of the schoolkill to take up their Winter Quarters. Genl. Washington in his Orders next Day returned my Regiment his thanks for their Conduct in the late reincountre with the Enemy. On the returns from the Captains our loss was one Officer and seventeen Privates missing. what part were killed Wounded or taken prisoners could not be ascertained. we were again Ordered to take

post on the West side of the Schoolkill. The main army passed on to the Valley Forge, erected Log Huts in regular Order of an encampment, the Ground being covered with Timber. Genl. Potter ordered a General Court Martial of which I was appointed the Judge advocate, for the tryal of those men who had thrown away their arms in the late retreat from the Enemy. several were found guilty of throwing away their muskets Cartouch Boxes knapsack, some Ordered to pay for them and others adjudged to be Publickly Whiped I was not a little grattified to find, not a single Gun, knapsack Cartouch Box or Blanket missing in my Regiment, which was highly Honourable to them. Genl. Potter ordered the sentence of the Court to be put in Execution, and several Men were actually whiped, from fifteen to thirty lashes which caused much murmuring among the Militia the General was highly sensured for it, the Men became so exasperated I really dreaded a mutiny but the Brigade being Ordered to join the other part of the Militia, under the Command of Genl. Armstrong at North Wales—the men became tranquil and passified. The following extract of a letter to me from Genl. Armstrong will give a better Idea of what effect the severity of this Discipline had on the minds of the People, whose friends were sufferers by the Judgement of the afores<sup>d</sup> Court Martial inflicted by Order of Genl. Potter.

CARLISLE 28<sup>th</sup> Jany 1778

DEAR COLO<sup>L</sup>

The Bearers time will only admit me to tell you that a great deal of heat and publick clamour hath gone abroad against Genl. Potter and the Members of a Certain Court Martial held by his Orders, the sentence of which they say was to punish with whiping & also paying for the Arms thrown away, which they consider as a double Punishment for one offence. In this peice of discipline its like some persons where Whiped who in other respects had been well behaved, and when at home are Creditable People I am persuaded on the other hand that the whole matter is not

fairly stated, and really concerned that the thing happened, which is still the more disagreeable as there is not a full opportunity of obviating the Peoples objections, they being so far detached from one another—That instance of discipline was no doubt too high; but, however some of them might have fully deserved it, a necessary policy was against it, and it grieves me that an Officer possessed of many good Qualities as Genl Potter is, should have such a Clamour raised against him on this occasion. as it is chiefly Western People who have been offended, there is no mention made of you, so that I suppose you will escape the Censure.

I am Dear Colo<sup>l</sup> your Affectionate  
Servt

JOHN ARMSTRONG

COLL<sup>N</sup> LACEY.

(To be continued.)